

FURTHER NOTES TOWARD A "PROJECT DESCRIPTION"

(To be read in conjunction with the description already provided in the Application)

The Dialogical Mode

A key mode in this Project's search for new discourse possibilities appropriate to contemporary video art, is what I call the "dialogical exercise" (dialogos). An example is provided in the form of an unedited transcript of a dialogical exercise with Peer Bode (along with an explanatory note). My practice of this dialogical mode goes back at least seven years, and there exists a long series of tape recordings mostly involving poets. One of these that was published in a highly edited form (involving the poet Robert Kelly) will be made available as part of these materials. An aspect of the present project is the application of this rather well developed mode to video, and an exploration of the ways that the resulting material might be incorporated into a new critical discourse appropriate to a rapidly developing art form.

The dialogical mode creates the context for new perceptions about a developing art form. It imitates, in a sense, the open-ended process of the art form itself, since it engages the artist in minutely focused thinking-in-dialogue and, by the interdisciplinary involvement with poets and other artists, it raises issues for the artist that might not otherwise come up in his or her thinking. It is therefore, a primary event in its own right, producing original materials out of which a new discourse might arise. The personalistic/individualistic perspectives (or even obscurations) of much criticism is replaced by a pluralistic and complexly extended field-perspective involving several (often irreconcilable) points of view.

The goal of this mode is not the integrated, unified, and epitomizing assertions of most art criticism, where the single critic attempts to shape material to fit his or her point of view. On the contrary, its goal is to preserve the differences inherent in a many-perspectives process of a changing art form -- to preserve the creative conflicts between artists, aesthetic positions, ideas, and purposes that exist in the field at large and within the mind of particular artists. The dialogical mode seeks to de-authoritize criticism, especially the sort of criticism that carries weight because of the social position (e.g., as editor), expertise, or skill in argument of the critic. Rather it seeks to reveal the multiphasic energies and thinking that is the real event behind and within a highly articulate and contextually sophisticated art.

The special advantage of involving poets in this process needs special mention. The situation of contemporary poetry is such that the multiplicity of significant poetic positions has evolved new strategies of discourse from which video criticism might learn -- which is not to say that the latter should imitate the former in the way that video criticism has often, to the detriment of the art form, imitated film and art criticisms. Rather it says that the subtlety and complexity of one art form's discourse can be structurally and procedurally instructive in another art form's discourse. Video is inherently interdisciplinary in at least two ways: first, as an art that involves visual/graphic images, organized sound, language, electronics, cybernetics, etc.; and, second, as an art that has attracted artists from many art forms, including painting, performance, sculpture, music, poetry, film, etc. I propose that this interdisciplinary context should not be abandoned in the hope for a "pure" representation of video (even if that were possible) but that rather it should be intensified, extended, and used to the special and appropriate advantage which it offers.

The Product

The end product of this project is a critical work in the form of a book. The book should contain a number of different elements:

- the results of five to ten dialogical exercises, distilled in a way appropriate to the emerging context of the book;
- written documents from the theoretical and descriptive work of the several artists whose video works are being presented;
- straight descriptions of the particular works under discussion (between perhaps ten and twenty);
- an analytical discussion of the artists and works in question, along with an account of the dialogical encounters;
- a graphic/visual representation of the works, schemas, plans, etc. under discussion;
- bibliography, videography, etc. as appropriate, involving the works of the artists but also the context of their concerns as involved in the discussions/dialogues.

The proportion of each of these must necessarily remain open at this time, due to the programmatically open nature of the project, but it would be fair to assume that most elements would receive something like equal space.

The graphic/visual representation is one of the areas in which real innovation should occur, involving as it does the full productional resources of Open Studio (an artist/writer production facility in Rhinebeck, N.Y.) and Station Hill Press (the eventual publisher of the book). A goal is to develop new ways of presenting such work in book form, including color experimentation in representing images in off-set printing.

The list of artists to be considered must also remain somewhat open at this point, although some names can be reliably listed: Gary Hill, Peter Bodo, the Vasulkas, Ralph Hocking, Paul Ryan, Steven Kolpan -- to list only some of those with whom I have been involved "dialogically" so far. (I have not discussed this project with most of these artists.) I am interested, however, in a wide range of other artists with whom I have not been involved in this way, including artists as different from each other as Barbara Buckner, Douglas Davis, Paul Viola, Juan Downey, Vito Acconci, Robert Morris, Peter Campus, etc. In addition, I have had fifteen years of close awareness of Nam June Paik's work (since we were colleagues together at Stony Brook and I first became interested in video), as well as "cross-over" artists like Jackson Mac Low and Allan Kaprow -- and these associations will bear on the study in ways not fully clear to me.